

Lake Winnebago 2008 Spring Refill Conference Call Minutes

- 1. Introduction.** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Detroit District held its annual Spring Refill conference call on 1 April 2008. The call began at approximately 9:30 a.m. CDT with Mr. John Allis starting with self-introductions of those in attendance. A list of participants may be found at the end of this document.
- 2. Presentation of the Agenda.** Mr. Allis followed with a brief overview of the agenda and explained the purpose of the call was to discuss Lake Winnebago spring refill, both the timing and extent.
- 3. Basin Conditions and Significant Events since the January drawdown conference call.** Mr. Allis provided an update of basin conditions over the last few months since the 9 January 2008 conference call. Some of the major highlights during this timeframe are as follows:
In general, the basin received a record amount of snow this winter. The region experienced constant temperatures while the USACE was conducting the winter drawdown of Lake Winnebago as discussed at the January conference call. The drawdown proceeded smoothly with outflows ranging from 3,600 – 7,200 cfs to accommodate some of the snow-melt that was occurring at this time. The winter drawdown target was lowered to provide extra capacity in the lake to handle this large amount of snow in the basin. A level of 1.59 feet was reached on March 13th.

After March 13th, the USACE allowed the lake level to gradually rise. This was an effort to capture some of the snow that was melting throughout the basin for several weeks. Based on the experience of several dry springs the past couple of years, the USACE wanted to capture more of the snowmelt this season just in case the basin experienced another dry spring. The lake could not reach too high of a level however, because capacity in the lake was still required to handle any potentially large spring rain events.

Mr. Allis stated that the level of Lake Winnebago was 2.15 feet on Monday morning, 31 March with four tainter gates open at the Menasha Dam and four tainter gates open at the Neenah Dam. However, the basin received about ¾ to 1-inch of rain during the day. This storm event required the USACE Fox River Sub-office (FRSO) personnel to open both tainter and needle gates at the Neenah Dam in an effort to lower the lake level to capture the additional supplies from the storm. The total outflows with seven needle gates opened at the Neenah Dam and one tainter gate opened at the Neenah Dam was estimated to be between 9,000-9,300 cfs. The FRSO personnel were busy throughout the day running the river keeping the pools within their required thresholds. Mr. Allis reported that the storm supplies from the upriver areas were expected to be near 10,000 cfs and would peak early next week at about 14,000 cfs. The USACE would evaluate

conditions during the week to determine if additional gate openings would be required to accommodate the increasing supplies.

4. **Snow Conditions.** Mr. Art Techlow of the Wisconsin DNR stated that most of the snow across the Lake Winnebago basin south of Shawano and west of Lake Winnebago is gone. The only major snow remaining in the basin is at the headwaters of the Wolf River which he estimated to be about 12-20 inches deep.
5. **Ice Cover.** Mr. Techlow reported that Lake Winnebago was 100% ice covered. The ice was about 20-inches thick late last week, but the recent rain has softened it up. He said the ice is still fastened to the shoreline and should probably start breaking up in the next few weeks. Mr. Techlow also stated that Lake Butte des Morts and the Winneconne Channel is mostly ice-free and Lake Poygan is still ice-covered. Given the existing weather forecasts, he believes ice-out on Lake Winnebago should occur in a few weeks. Mr. Techlow reported that WDNR pilots conduct Lake Winnebago fly-overs on a daily basis during the ice season. He would keep the USACE updated as conditions warrant. Input on ice conditions around Lake Winnebago was requested by the USACE. Mr. Allis provided the following e-mail to submit any information pertinent to the request.

hphm@usace.army.mil.

6. **Spring Weather Forecasts.** Mr. Tom Helman of the National Weather Service provided the following short and long-term outlooks.

	<u>8-14 Day</u>	<u>30 Day</u>
Precipitation	above average	above average
Temperatures	average	average

Mr. Helman also informed the participants that about 1-inch of rain is forecasted for the basin next week.

7. **Refill Plan.** Mr. Allis stated that the refill plan for Lake Winnebago would be done on a gradual basis. He noted that the current USACE models predict that lake level would be near 2.4 feet by the time ice is out in about 1-2 weeks. At that time, adjustments would be made to bring to level of Lake Winnebago to 3.0 feet navigation season level by 1 June 2008.
8. **Open Discussion.** Mr. Mike Pedersen of Kaukauna Utilities remarked that the higher flows on the river has pulled brush recently cut by property owners and stored along the shoreline in their trash racks. For the time being no significant damage was reported, but this cut brush was causing some issues for their trash racks. As long as the river flows remain high, the potential for damage that could impact both Kaukauna Utility and USACE operations continues. Finally, Mr. Pedersen complimented the USACE especially Mr. Bob Stanick and his FRSO

crew for working with the utility during the recent storm event. He was pleased with the quick response and adjustments along the entire Lower Fox River.

Mr. Techlow surmised that the ice would be breaking up in 1-2 weeks. An increase to 2.4 feet prior to ice-out and a gradual increase to 3.0 feet by 1 June would not have an adverse impact on environmental issues. Mr. Techlow commented on the brush issue. He stated that the WDNR and local authorities were not aware of the recent debris/brush cleanup. Some of the “woody debris” is good for habitat, but it is the responsibility of the property owners to remove the stored brush to avoid the potential for damage at the dams along the Lower Fox River. He noted that property owners can burn the brush on the ice as long as the ashes are cleaned up.

Mr. Techlow also responded to an algae statement tabled by a participant. He stated that algae will develop whenever calm, warm temperatures exist on the lake. Drought conditions further compound the condition. Only rain and winds can effectively break up the algae growths.

Mr. Skip Palermo from the Appleton Yacht Club expressed concerned with the rising water levels associated with the increase in river flows. He stated that his club has tenants who store their larger boats in covered slips. A significant rise in the Upper Appleton pool could damage both the slips and boats. Mr. Bob Stanick from the FRSO stated that the Appleton YC is just upstream of the bottleneck at Grignon Rapids Channel. He and his crew are on top of all the pool elevations along the Lower Fox River. That particular pool is rarely allowed to rise above the upper threshold elevation. Mr. Palermo said that he appreciates the effort USACE is giving to maintain water levels.

Mr. Bill Hitchcock, from Windpoint Harbor concurred with the proposed plan to bring the level of Lake Winnebago up to the navigation season level of 3.0 feet (OD) by June 1. It is a good compromise between the environment, water enthusiasts and businesses on Lake Winnebago.

Judy Johnson from the Tri-County Powerboat Alliance reported that the river levels were high above Fremont. She also mentioned that the Wolf River Clean-up will take place on June 7th.

Mark Lee, a property owner on the east shore of Lake Winnebago, south of Oshkosh, commented on ice damage to his property that occurred this year. Ice movement caused significant damage to his permanent piers. He questioned whether or not water levels may have been the cause. Additional discussion among the participants revealed that ice movement and not shoves may have been the problem. They further stated that numerous individuals observed ice expansion in the shallow areas which may have caused the ice to move and cause damage.

Mr. Techlow suggested calling local marine contractors to obtain their thoughts on this concern as well as having the USACE further investigate the property

owners concerns regarding ice movement. USACE agreed that they would do some investigation into damages due to ice in Lake Winnebago.

Rob Easter, a property owner, questioned whether or not the 3.0 feet (OD) navigation season level has been changed in recent years. Mr. Techlow stated that since 1982, the USACE has been regulating Lake Winnebago using the Linde Plan. This plan, named for its author WDNR biologist, Arlyn Linde, was intended to satisfy hydropower interests, while preserving or enhancing fish, wildlife, wetland habitat and water quality in the Lower Fox River and the Lake Winnebago pool. He confirmed that 3.0 has been the target of this plan for many years.

Mr. Allis adjourned the call at approximately 11:300 CDT.

Participants:

USACE: Marie Strum, John Allis, Dave Barilovich, Bob Stanick, Jim Bonetti, Keith Kompoltowicz, Rich Gifaldi, Missy Kropfreiter.

Other Agencies:

Craig Moser – US Representative’s Kagen’s Office
Art Techlow – Wisconsin DNR
Mike Pedersen – Kaukauna Utilities
Harlan Kiesow - Fox River Navigation System Authority
Frank Kreiger –Neenah Paper
Bob Stark – Fox River Navigation Authority
Rob Elliott – U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Steve Brand – City of Oshkosh
Tom Helman - NWS
Citizens and Groups:
Skip Palermo – Appleton Yacht Club
Bill Hitchcock – Windpoint Harbor
Chad Casper – Winnebago County
James Rabe – Property Owner
Bill Steffen – Property Owner
Sherman Jacobson – Property Owner
Tom Buchta – Neenah Harbor Commission
Mark Lee – Property Owner
Judy Johnson – Tri-County Powerboat Alliance
Rob Easter – Property Owner